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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Christopher Evans, et al.

Serial No. N/A

Group Art Unit: N/A

Filed: Herewith

Examiner: N/A

Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR SOCCER TRAINING AND PRACTICE

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Box Patent Application

Sir:

Transmitted herewith for the above-identified
utility patent application are the following:

1. Fee Transmittal form;
2. Specification (12 pages);
3. Drawings (informal) (6 sheets);
4. Declaration (executed) (4 pages);
5. Small entity statement (individual inventor);
6. Check; and
7. Return receipt post card.

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A check in the amount of \$ 345.00 is enclosed. The Assistant Commissioner for Patents is hereby authorized to charge any deficiencies to or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 03-2410, Order No. 11714-P02.

Respectfully submitted,

CHRISTOPHER EVANS, et al., Applicants

By: Christine M. Kuta Jan. 28, 2000
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**STATEMENT CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY STATUS
(37 C.F.R. §1.9(f) & §1.27(b)) -- Independent Inventor**

Applicant: Christopher Evans, et al.

Serial No. N/A

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Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR SOCCER TRAINING AND PRACTICE

As a below named inventor, I hereby state that I qualify as an independent inventor as defined in 37 C.F.R. §1.9(c) for purposes of paying reduced fees to the Patent and Trademark Office described in the specification filed herewith with title as listed above.

I have not assigned, granted, conveyed, or licensed, and am under no obligation under contract or law to assign, grant, convey, or license, any rights in the invention to any person who would not qualify as an independent inventor under 37 C.F.R. §1.9(c) if that person had made the invention, or to any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 C.F.R. §1.9(d) or a nonprofit organization under 37 C.F.R. §1.9(e).

Each person, concern, or organization to which I have assigned, granted, conveyed, or licensed or am under an obligation under contract or law to assign, grant, convey, or license any rights in the invention is listed below:

 X No such person, concern, or organization exists.

 Each such person, concern, or organization is listed below:

Separate statements are required from each named person, concern, or organization having rights to the invention stating their status as small entities. (37 C.F.R. §1.27)

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of paying, the earliest of the issue fee or any maintenance fee due after on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 C.F.R. §1.28(b))

0032101735460

Apparatus and Method for Soccer Training and Practice

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Serial No. 09/162,976 entitled, "Apparatus and Method for Soccer Training and Practice" filed September 5 29, 1998 by the present applicants.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to ball sports devices and more particularly to a soccer practice device having a 10 tethered ball.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Soccer is a team sport and serious players practice long hours with a team. When an individual player wishes to 15 practice on his or her own, difficulty arises. The part of the game which involves kicking the ball a distance from the player, for example shots on goal, creates a ball retrieval problem.

A device to facilitate soccer practice for a single 20 player which returns the soccer ball to the player after it is kicked has obvious benefits. Two such devices are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,620,186 and 4,147,353. Both devices, however, have shortcomings in the anchoring means and the ball holding means. Both the '186 and the '353 25 devices use a "tent stake" means for anchoring the device.

Anchoring by means of a simple tent stake in the ground might be suitable for young children, but not for stronger players. It is possible for a high school, college or professional player to dislodge an ordinary "tent" stake with a few
5 powerful kicks. This makes these soccer practice devices ineffective, and also potentially dangerous. Further, the prior art devices lack freedom of movement of the ball's tether around the stake. The tether in the prior art devices wraps around the "tent stake" anchoring means and prohibits
10 the free movement of the ball around and over the anchoring means. This lack of freedom of movement of the ball also inhibits the ball from rolling back to the player freely, smoothly and without the tangling of the tether cord.

The problems in the ball holding means are also
15 significant. To a soccer player, the feel of the ball when kicking is an important element of feedback and a vital aspect of training and practice. Existing prior art devices use straps, sewn overlapping fastenings, metal rings or Velcro closings to hold the ball. All of these coverings on
20 the ball cause an uneven, bumpy feel upon kicking the ball and impede the rolling of the ball when it returns to the player.

It remains desirable to have a soccer practice device for strong players which approximates normal game play.

25 It is an object of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus to firmly and securely anchor a tethered soccer ball.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus to tether a soccer ball to an anchor such that the tether does not become entangled with the anchor during play.

5 It is another object of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus to hold a soccer ball in a practice device such that the ball retains the feel of a ball in normal soccer play.

10 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The problems of anchoring a tether and holding a soccer ball are solved by the present invention of soccer practice device having a stable anchoring means, and a tethering means that resists tangling and which allows the ball to roll smoothly.

15 The present invention is an apparatus for holding and retrieving a soccer ball including an anchoring means which consists of a spiral tie down stake. A circular upper portion of the tie down stake holds a ring. A detachable link attaches one end of a tether cord to the ring. At the other end of the tether cord, a net holds a soccer ball. The detachable link has a swivel-eyebolt connection that allows a 360° spin for the ball.

25 The circular upper portion, ring, and swivel-eyebolt on the detachable link allow the soccer ball great freedom of movement thus simulating real soccer play.

The present invention together with the above and other advantages may best be understood from the following detailed description of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the drawings, wherein:

5

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a first preferred embodiment of a ball anchoring means according to principles
10 of the invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the tie down stake, the rotating ring, the rotating loop and the detachable link of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of the tether and
15 detachable link of Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a perspective view of the net holding the soccer ball of Figure 1;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of a second preferred embodiment of a ball anchoring means according to principles
20 of the invention;

Figure 6 is a perspective view of a third preferred embodiment of a ball anchoring means according to principles of the invention; and

Figure 7 is a side view of the anchoring means of Figure
25 6.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 1 is shows a first embodiment of a soccer practice device 10 according to the principles of the present invention. The first embodiment of the soccer practice device 10 has a spiral tie down stake 15 which has a spiraled lower portion 20, which, in use, is inserted into the ground. The upper portion 25 of the stake is bent into a triangular shape forming a handle for pushing the stake 15 in and pulling the stake 15 out of the ground. A lower stop 30 and a upper stop 35 are positioned on the stake 15 between the handle 25 and the spiraled lower portion 20. The stake 15 has a rotating loop 40 which is attached to the stake 15 by means of a pin 45 and a rotating ring 50. The rotating ring 50 is held in place along the length of the stake by the lower 30 and upper 35 stops. A detachable link 55 is attached to the rotating loop 40 by a clasp 60 which releases with a thumb spring mechanism 65. The detachable link 55 also has a swivel-eyebolt 70. The swivel-eyebolt 70 holds one end of a tether 75, which in the present embodiment, is an elastic cord. The other end of the tether 75 holds a drawstring 80 for a net 85 which holds a soccer ball 90. In the present embodiment, the elastic cord tether 75 has clamped loops on both ends for attachment to the swivel-eyebolt 70 and the drawstring 80, but other attachment means are possible.

In operation, the tie down stake 15 anchors the tethered soccer ball 90. The ball 90 may be kicked about by the user

without tangling the tether 75 because of the freedom of movement of the ball 90 in relation to the stake 15 as will be described below.

Figure 2 shows the tie down stake 15, the rotating ring 50, the rotating loop 40 and the detachable link 55 with indicators showing the freedom of movement of the various components. The rotating ring 50 and rotating loop 40 form a rotating tether cord attachment means which provide the soccer ball with the freedom of movement to simulate realistic soccer ball play. The detachable link 55 with the swivel-eye bolt 70 provides even more freedom of movement. The rotating ring 50 rotates around the stake 15 with 360° freedom of movement. The rotating loop 40 rotates around the pin 45 with 360° freedom of movement. The swivel-eyebolt 70 rotates around the axis of the detachable link 55 with 360° freedom of movement. The rotational freedom of movement of the ring 50, the loop 40, and the swivel-eye bolt 70 allows the soccer ball 90 tethered to the stake 15 to spin and roll with a minimum of tangling of the tether 75.

Figure 3 shows the tether 75 with clamped loops at both ends. One end of the tether 75 is connected to the swivel-eyebolt 70 of the detachable link 55. The swivel-eyebolt 70 allows 360° rotation about the axis of the detachable link 55. The tether 75 is removable from the stake 15 so that cords of various lengths and degrees of elasticity may be attached to the stake 15. This allows players with different skill levels to be accommodated and enables different techniques to

be practiced such as indirect and direct kicks, penalty kicks, corner kicks, goal kicks, throw-ins, and trapping. In addition, by being removable, worn tethers may be easily replaced.

5 Figure 4 shows the soccer ball 90 enclosed in the net
85. The net 85 may be made of nylon or some other strong,
flexible material. Because of the adjustability of the net
85 with the drawstring 80, the net 85 can accommodate various
sizes of soccer balls. After the soccer ball 90 is inserted
10 into net 85, the drawstring 80 is drawn snug and tied off and
then attached to the tether 75.

Figure 5 shows a second alternative embodiment of the soccer practice device according to principles of the present invention. The second alternative embodiment has a weighted base 100 and a connection element 110 to anchor the soccer ball 90. The detachable link 55 attaches to the base 100 by means of the connection element 110. The ball is tethered as before with the elastic tether 75 and the net 85. The weighted base 100 shown is cylindrically-shaped with tapered sides, but other shapes may be used. Also, the weighted base 100 may be of various sizes, for instance sized according to the strength and skill levels of the anticipated users. The weighted base 100 may be made of plastic or metal. The weighted base 100 is hollow and may be filled through the filling opening 115 by sand or some other dense filling material.

Figures 6 and 7 show a third alternative embodiment of the soccer practice device according to principles of the present invention. The third alternative embodiment has a tie down stake which has a spiraled lower portion 120, which
5 in use, is inserted into the ground. The upper portion of the stake is formed into a circular holder 125 that holds a ring 130 which is free to travel along a substantial portion of the circular upper portion of the stake. A handle 135 projects from the tie down stake below the circular holder
10 125. In operation, the spiraled lower portion is inserted into the ground 140, and a tether is attached to the ring 130 by for example the detachable link 55 shown in Figure 1. The circular holder 125, ring 130, and rotating detachable link 55 provide a high degree of freedom of movement for the
15 soccer ball and simulate the motion of the ball in free play.

The tie down stake and handle as shown in Figures 6 and 7 are made of one piece of material spiraled and turned to form this embodiment of the soccer practice device. Alternatively, the device could be formed of a plurality of
20 pieces. For example, the lower portion, upper portion and handle could be manufactured as separate pieces which are then assembled to form the soccer practice device. Other manufacturing and assembly configurations are possible within the scope of the invention.

25 The present invention allows a serious player of any ability to go out to a soccer field or back yard on his or her own and get in an intensive practice on a particular

skill, at his or her own pace in an efficient manner.

Further, the device is of simple construction of durable individual parts capable of being quickly exchanged to allow for the practice of a variety of techniques by players at
5 different skill levels, as well as enabling any worn part to be readily replaced.

It is to be understood that the above-described embodiments are simply illustrative of the principles of the invention. Various and other modifications and changes may
10 be made by those skilled in the art which will embody the principles of the invention and fall within the spirit and scope thereof.

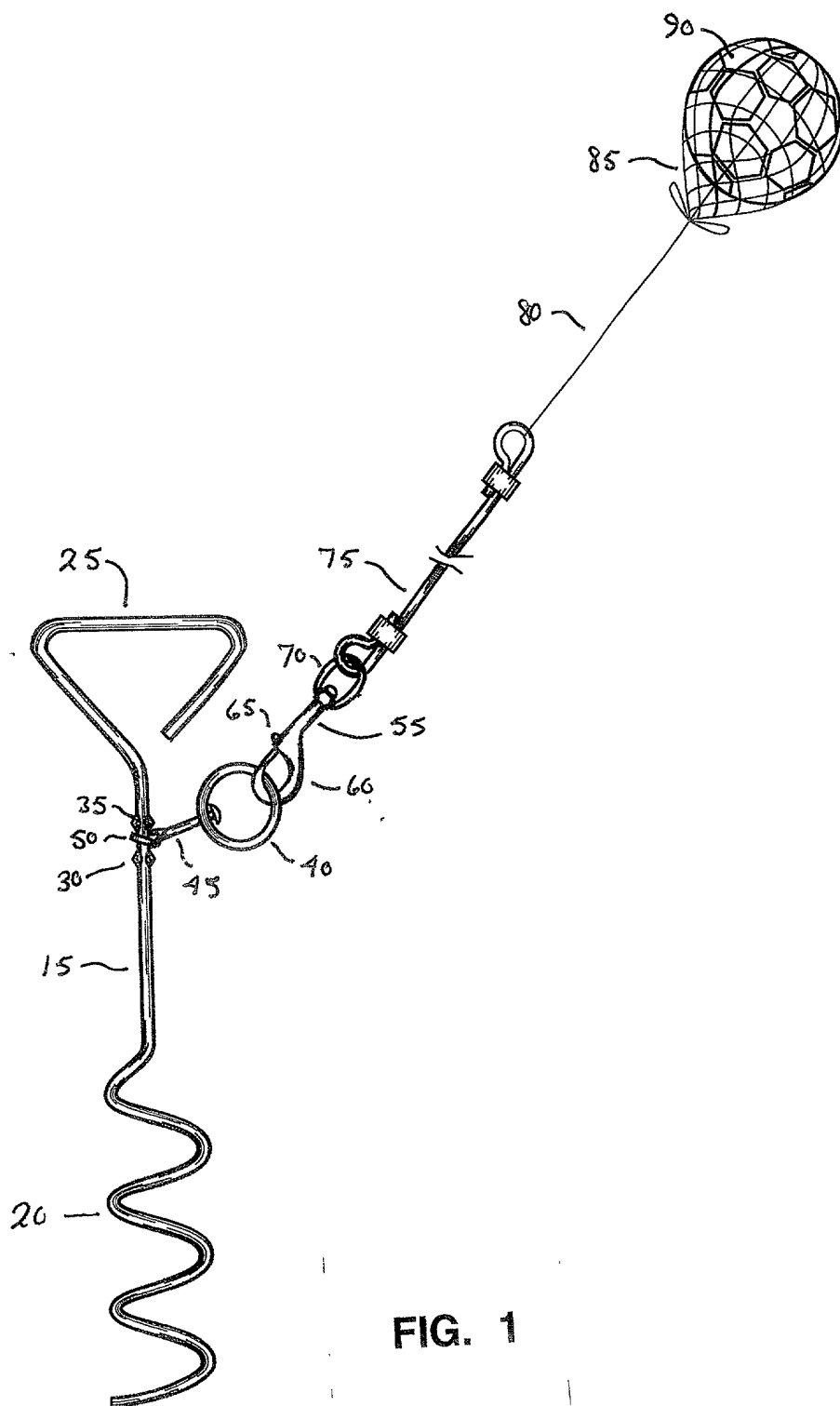
What is claimed is:

- 1 1. An apparatus for holding a soccer ball, comprising:
 - 2 a) a tie down stake having
 - 3 i) a spiraled lower portion to be inserted into the
 - 4 ground; and
 - 5 ii) a circular-shaped upper portion;
 - 6 b) a ring on said circular-shaped upper portion, said
 - 7 ring able to travel along a substantial portion of said
 - 8 circular-shaped upper portion, said ring to hold a tether to
 - 9 said tie down stake; and
 - 10 c) a handle under said circular-shaped upper portion.
- 1 2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said handle projects
- 2 from said tie-down stake.
- 1 3. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a detachable
- 2 link attached to said ring, said detachable link to attach
- 3 the tether to said tie down stake.
- 1 4. The apparatus of claim 3 further wherein said detachable
- 2 link has a swivel-eye bolt rotatable about the axis of said
- 3 detachable link.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An apparatus for holding and returning a soccer ball includes an anchoring means. A preferred embodiment of the anchoring means is a tie down stake having a spiraled lower portion (120). A circular upper portion (125) of the tie down stake holds a ring (130). A detachable link (55) attaches one end of a tether cord (75) to the ring. At the other end of the tether cord, a net holds a soccer ball. The detachable link has a swivel-eyebolt connection (70) that allows a 360° spin for the ball. A handle (135) under the circular upper portion of the tie down stake projects away from the tie down stake. The circular upper portion, ring, and swivel-eyebolt on the detachable link allow the soccer ball great freedom of movement thus simulating real soccer play.

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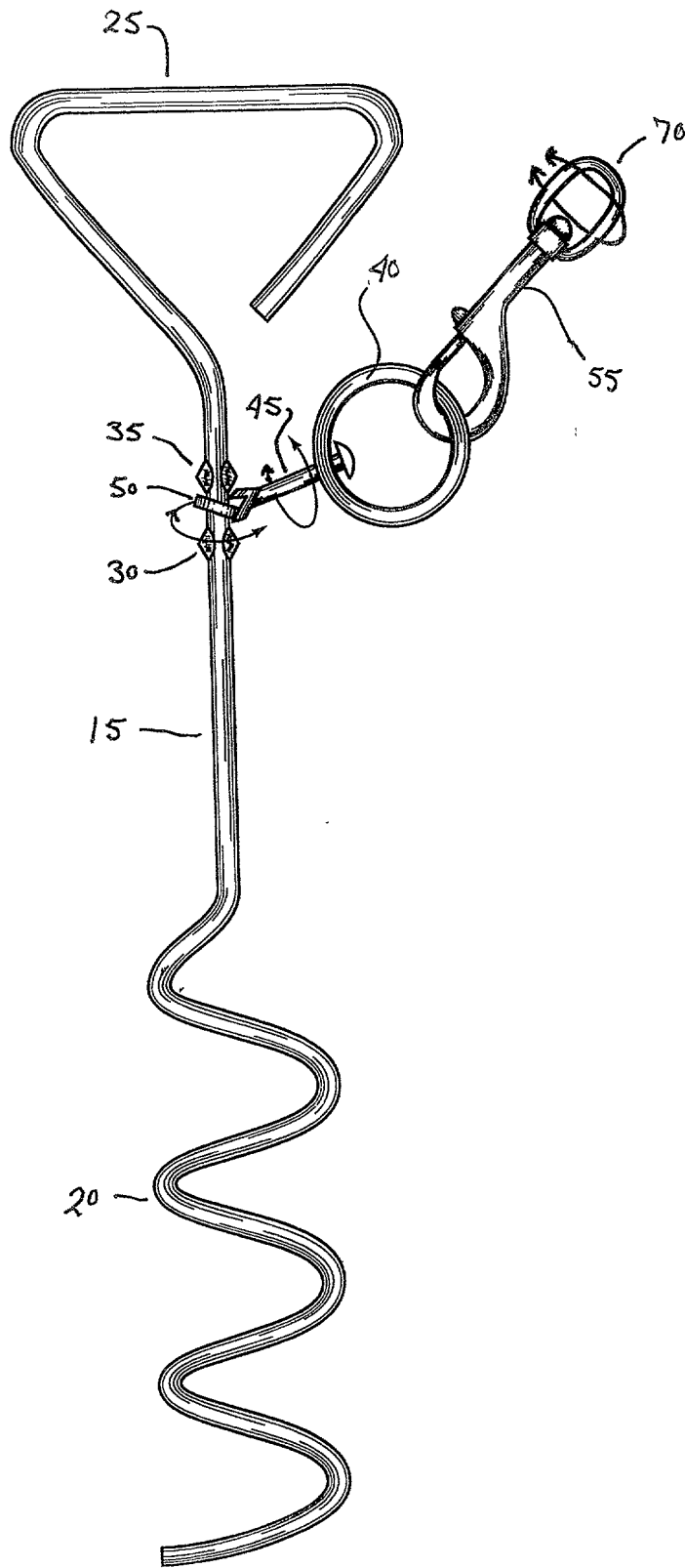


FIG. 2

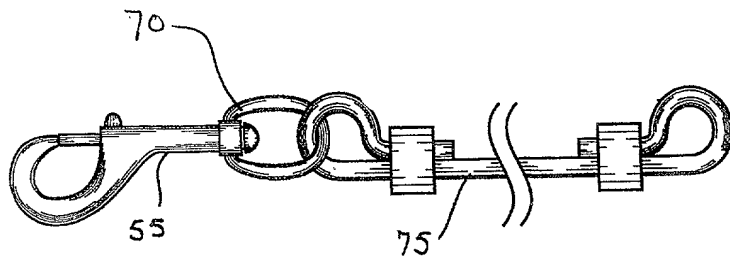


FIG. 3

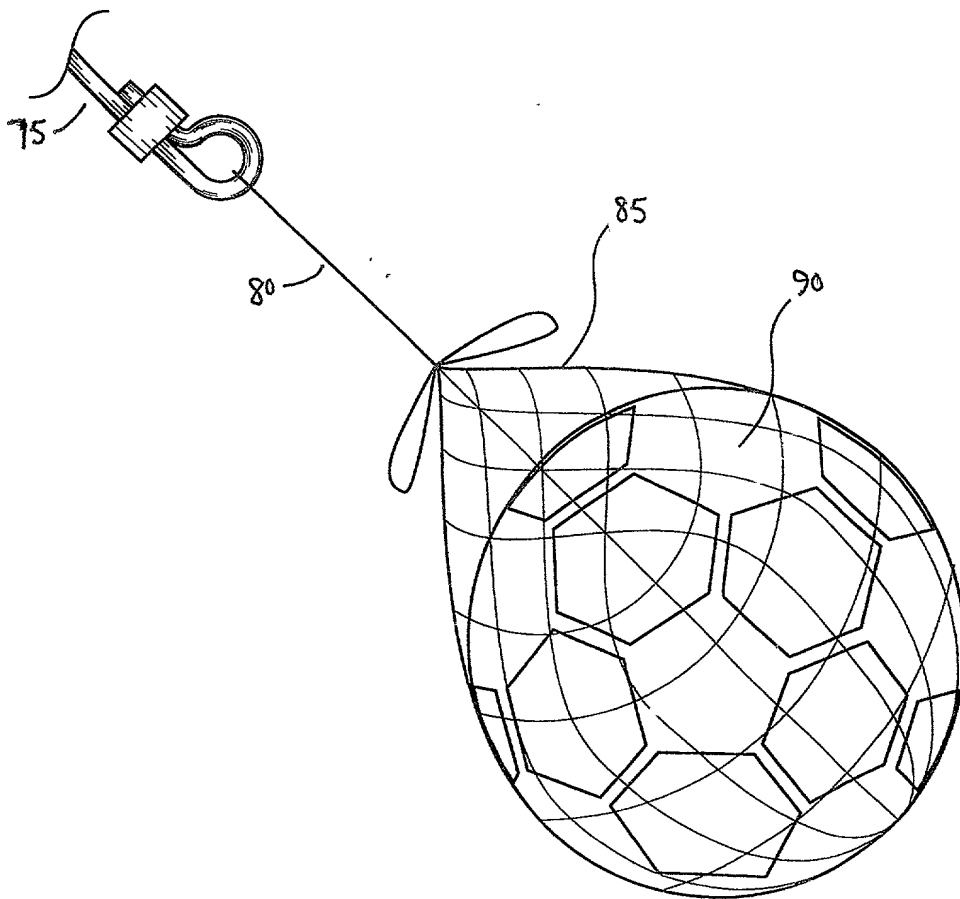


FIG. 4

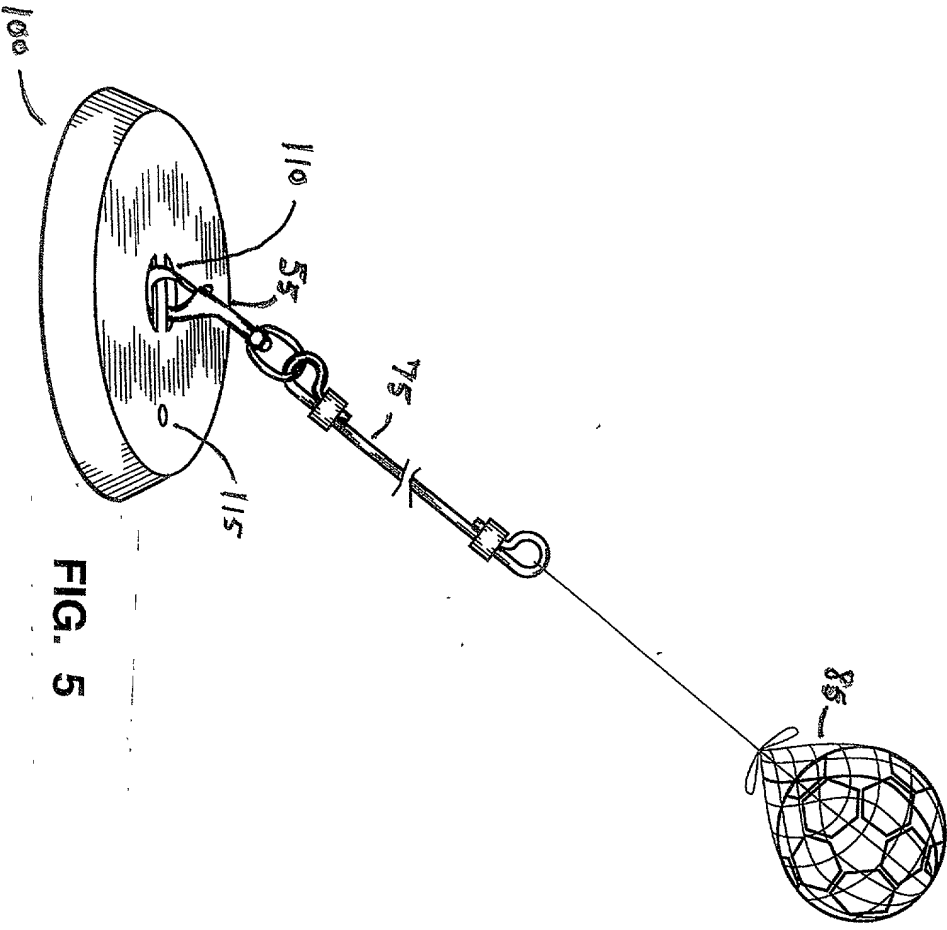


FIG. 5

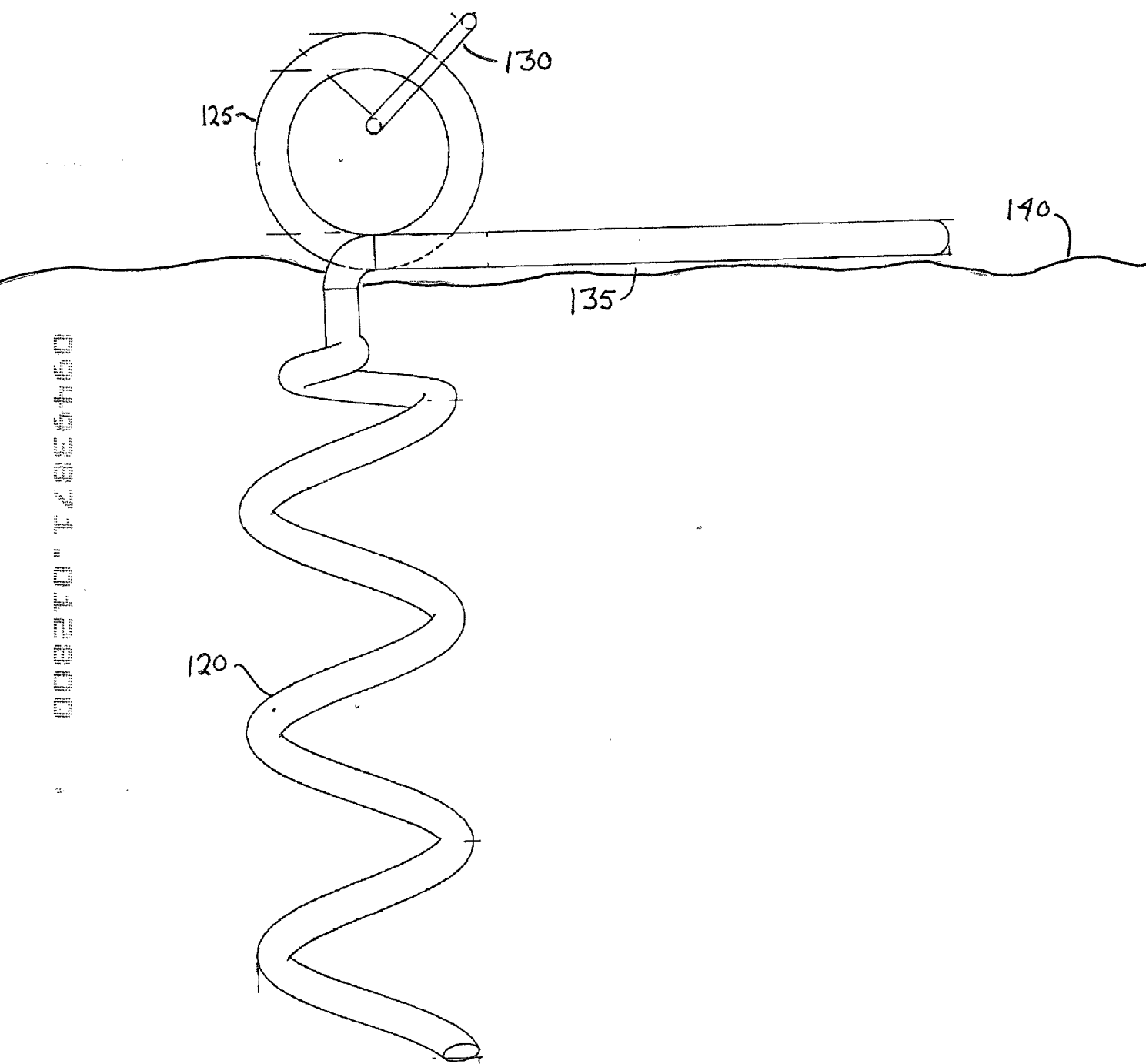


FIG. 7

Serial No. N/A Group Art Unit: N/A

Filed: Herewith Examiner: N/Z

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

I believe, I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or, the below named inventors are the original, first and joint inventors (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims (and as amended by any amendment specifically referred to above).

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. §1.19(a)-(d) or §365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or 365(a) of any PCT international application which designated at least one country other than the United States of America, listed below and have also identified below, by checking the box,

any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or of any PCT international application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Prior Foreign Application Number(s)	Country	Foreign Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Priority Not Claimed	Certified Copy Attached? YES/NO

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. §119(e) of any United States Provisional application(s) listed below.

Application Number	Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. §120 of any United States application(s), or 365(c) of any PCT international application designating the United States of America, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT international application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. §112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 C.F.R. §1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:


U.S. Parent Application or PCT Parent Number	Parent Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Parent Patent Number (if applicable)
09/162,976	09/29/1998	

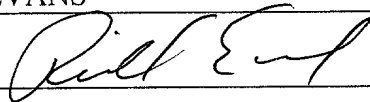
As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following registered practitioner(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the United States Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith:

All correspondence should be addressed to:

All telephone calls should be directed to Christine M. Kuta
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